Achievement test scores up in state for 4th-, 6th-graders

By DOUG MYERS

Louisiana's fourth- and sixth-grade public school students fared better this year than a year ago on achievement tests.

The test is aimed at rating their language, mathematics and reading skills against the national norm, a new report shows.

"It's good news, and we're very encouraged," state Superintendent of Education Raymond Arveson said Tuesday. "It just helps our determination to work on making them improve still more and helping our youngsters do that."

During the last school year, about 100,000 Louisiana public school students in grades 4 and 6 took the California Achievement Test, which is used to judge the achievement of students nationwide.

Louisiana's fourth-grade students scored above the national group in language, mathematics, spelling and study skills, and scored just below the national average in reading, science and social studies.

However, the group still ranked below the national average in reading, language, mathematics, science and social studies.

In East Baton Rouge Parish, fourth-grade public school students scored much better against the national norm than their sixth-grade counterparts.

East Baton Rouge sixth-graders scored below average in all seven areas of the test. Fourth-graders in the parish scored above average in language, mathematics, spelling and study skills, but below average in reading, science and social studies.

A state advisory committee in 1987 selected the CAT as the instrument to compare the performance of the state's students to the performance of the nation.

Arveson said the improvements were particularly good at the fourth-grade level, attributing the gains to increased efforts on the state level to emphasize early childhood education.

"Our concentration (has been) on building skill development and developing mentally sound work for those youngsters in kindergarten, first grade and on up through the third grade," Arveson said. "...We've stressed that building a strong foundation in the basics — reading, language arts, mathematics — and this tells me that we are getting some results."

Arveson said he is interested in seeing improvements "beyond the fourth grade and into our upper grades in high school."

Noting he is proud of the test score improvements "we've got a way to go yet, but we are moving up."

ACHIEVEMENT SCORES UP

This chart compares the performance of Louisiana's fourth- and sixth-grade students during the last two school years on the California Achievement Test.

The number shown is the national percentile of the middle-ranked student in each of the state's 66 public school districts on the CAT total battery of tests. A figure above 50 indicates achievement above the national median for that grade; a figure below 50 indicates achievement below the national median.

Statewide, scores were up slightly during the past school year.